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Thinking small: the politics of devolution

One useful way to test the efficacy of an institution is to watch what it does with a good idea.

Take a sound and simple concept such as community service. For most of our history it has been a central cultural trait. In 1630 John Winthrop told his flock as it moored in Salem, "We must delight in each other, make others conditions our own... always having before our eyes our community as members of the same body." Later, DeToqueville would notice: "I have often admired the extreme skill with which the inhabitants of the United States succeeded in proposing a common object for the exertions of a great many men and inducing them voluntarily to pursue it." From barn raising to volunteer fire departments, the American tradition of cooperation was so ingrained that even when, with the Peace Corps, John Kennedy applied the principle to many communities very far away, it kept its integrity, its individuality and its purpose.

In the 1980s, however, strange things began happening to community service. Some of the transformation was due to a White House that declared "volunteerism" a reasonable substitute for governmental action, at least for the duration of a political speech. In other quarters, it became an alternative form of punishment. Oliver North, for example, was assigned "community service" rather than being sent to prison.

Quietly, the concept was being institutionalized and federalized, part of a covert socialism of the soul enveloping the country as politicians substituted proselytizing for policies and moral lectures for money. In Congress, bills sprouted that proposed what had now been transmogrified into "national service." Some of these measures still assumed people would volunteer, but others felt that citizens -- especially younger ones -- would have to be drafted into goodness. A group of well-cushioned think-tankers declared themselves communitarians (a merger of *community* and *authoritarian* perhaps?) and began dreaming up ways of bringing "responsibility" to the masses. Soon average politicians, especially conservatives such as the erstwhile governor of Arkansas, had picked up the cry. Ex cathedra they announced that the American citizen no longer had merely rights, but for every right an attendant "responsibility.'

It was an insistence at odds with the spirit of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, whose authors had considered our rights "unalienable" and who had been quite willing to assign specific tasks to elected officials but refused to even require the ordinary citizen to vote. It was at odds with reality: a Gallup survey found that over half of all American adults and nearly two-thirds of the young already engaged in some form of community service. Further it was at odds with the lifestyles of those promulgating it, who tended to be smug and comfortable beneficiaries of a system that was purloining both the rights and responsibilities of its citizens and who themselves were rarely seen at PTA or city council meetings. As the White House and the Congress became more mired in their own corrupt irresponsibility, politicians began arguing that the real problem was the indifference and sloth of the public.

The recent campaign further confused matters. By the end of it, Clinton had added several layers of meaning to the concept of community service. Now, it seemed, community service would be a way students could pay off

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The Progressive Review

Bucking the system since 1966

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part of the college loans the campaign had promised them. Further, the venture into virtue by these students was to be substantially subsidized. What similar benefits would accrue to those unable to finish college (currently 78% of all whites, and about 90% of all blacks and latinos) was not made clear by the campaign.

Not that Clinton's national service was going to be all fun and games. He wanted 100,000 of the community servants to work as cops, presumably feeling they were more needed than, say, 100,000 teachers. And news stories touted a prototype in Boston in which the participants started off the day with mass calisthenics, a paradigm of community service apparently borrowed from the Chinese. Other advocates even suggested that the military should be enlisted in community service, thus preparing it for a peacetime economy -- or at least for urban pacification.

By this point it was hard to know just what community service meant anymore. To mind came the image of discharged Marines, recently graduated Yale English majors and drug addicts diverted from incarceration, all doing pushups in front of city hall at 6 am before marching off to solve the urban crisis.

Just what is community service now? Still a natural part of our cultural heritage? A by-product of our moral and religious beliefs? An indulgence to be paid by prospective investment bankers and corporate lawyers? A subsidy to potential members of the quarter of America that will form an economic elite under the Clinton paradigm? A form of punishment? A way to get welfare mothers to stop driving around in their Cadillacs? A tactic for peacetime conversion? A cheap means to get more cops on the streets? A symbol that somebody up there cares about the cities? A reference to social conscience on the resumes of future politicians? One more requirement for citizens by a government that judges its progress by how many such strictures it can approve? Part of the compulsive urge by those in power to control ever more aspects of American social life?

I don't know the answer, but more importantly I seriously doubt that anyone in the Clinton administration, including its namesake, does either. Community service, like many other sound and simple ideas, has been kidnapped and seems headed for enforced duty in the entropic, bloated system we call our federal government. It is possible that the decentralized, unmanipulative version proposed by a national commission on the subject will make it through the political swamps, but don't count on it. It is far more likely that community service will become whatever seems bureaucratically feasible, politically advantageous and rhetorically useful. For the virtue that DeTocqueville noted we may soon have to find another name.

The distortion of community service is the inevitable result of attempting to reproduce within a giant system results that depend upon humans acting like humans. What works so well in the manufacture of a Ford Taurus -- efficiency of scale and mass production -- fails to work in social policy because, unlike a Taurus, humans think, cry, love, get distracted, criticize, worry or don't give a shit.

Yet we keep acting as though such traits don't exist or don't matter. We have come to accept the notion that the enormous institutions of government, media, industry and

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academia are natural to the human condition and then keep wondering why they don't work better than they do.

In fact, as ecological planner Ernest Callenbach pointed out recently, "we are medium-sized animals who naturally live in small groups -- perhaps 20 or so -- as opposed to bees or antelopes who live in very large groups. When managers or generals or architects force us into large groups, we speedily try to break them down into sub-units of comfortable size."

Too often, however, we fail. Even the average reporter, a recent study tells us, now works in a newsroom with 45 other people, typically for a publication owned by a chain. Today, if you want to tell it to the boss, you may have to travel a couple of thousand miles just to get to the receptionist.

All of our systems appear to be on steroids. And like the drugged athlete, nature eventually pulls the plug. The institutions that have imposed a tyranny of size upon us not only fail to accomplish what they set out to do but are themselves disintegrating.

The collapse of such huge institutions is a primary characteristic of our times. The Soviet Union falls apart and no sooner have we declared the Cold War won than a new American administration tells us it will not be able to carry out the normal functions of a government because -- although of course not saying so as bluntly -- it thinks it is nearing bankruptcy. Corporate icons like Sears General Motors and IBM totter. The entire savings and loan industry hits the mat. Our city governments are in extraordinary disarray.

We see it and yet we don't. Our loyalty to our assumptions and ideologies as well as our natural difficulty in accepting mortality even in non-human systems lead us to underrate such changes, to keep trying to do things the old way one more time.

I was reminded of this a couple of summers ago at the annual convention of the longtime liberal group, Americans for Democratic Action. I proposed a resolution on the decentralization of power. Aware of the conventional liberal faith in the benign nature of the federal government, I asked, in the manner of Quaker queries, only for inquiry -- a conference that would consider a number of issues not generally discussed in liberal circles. Since I worked hard on the resolution, permit me to recycle a portion:

There is growing evidence that old ideological conflicts such as between left and right, and between capitalism and communism, are becoming far less important as the world confronts the social and economic results of a century marked by increasing concentration of power in countries of widely varying political persuasion. A new ideology is rising, the ideology of devolution -- the decentralization of power. Already it has swept through the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Its voice is heard in Spain, in Quebec and in Northern Ireland. It is the voice of people attempting to regain control over societies that have become increasingly authoritarian, unresponsive, and insensitive, a revolt of ordinary humans against the excesses of the state.

Viewed in this context, the changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe may represent not only the decline of communism, but -- perhaps more importantly -- the first victories in a global revolution against the tyranny of the nation-state.

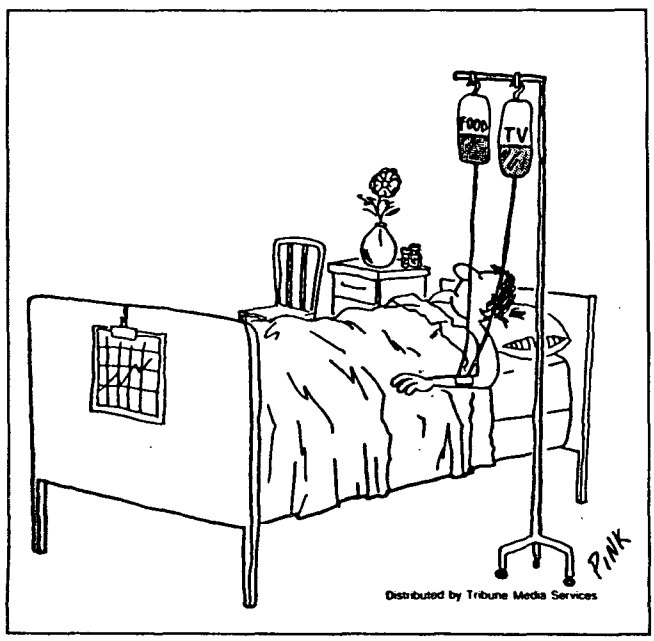
America is not immune from these forces. All around us is evidence of the disintegration of effective government and a growing alienation of the people from that government as a result. Our systems of governance have become too big, too corrupt, too inflexible and too remote from democratic concerns to respond equitably and rationally to the changing needs of the people.

Government has many beneficial functions it can perform, but these can only be achieved when the government itself is structured so as to reflect -- and not thwart -- the will of the people.

Therefore we embrace the devolutionary spirit of the times and, recognizing that the ideology of scale must now be considered as carefully as the ideology of liberal and conservative, we urge that this nation begin devolving power back to the people -- that we correct a decades-long course which has too often led to increasingly centralized power with increasingly ineffective and undemocratic results.

To this end, we propose the following critical issues to fellow liberals and progressives to consider, debate and act upon while there is still time to reverse the authoritarian course of the American government:

- How do we end the growing concentration of power in the presidency and return to the tripartite system of government intended by the Constitution? How can Congress reassert its constitutional role in the federal government?
- How do we prevent federal government green-mail of the states -- the granting or withholding of federal funds to force state legislation -- from being used as a way around the powers constitutionally granted the states?
- How can we decentralize federal agencies to the state and local level?
- How do we create a new respect for state and local rights? The bitter struggle to establish the federal government's primacy in the protection of civil rights of all its citizens has been used far too long as an excuse to concentrate all forms of power in Washington. That legal battle has been won. We must



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now recognize the importance of state and local government in creative, responsive governance and not continue to assume that good government can only come from within the Beltway.

- How do we reduce restrictions on federal funds granted states and localities in order to foster imaginative local application of those funds and to prevent the sort of federal abuse apparent, for example, in restrictions on family planning advice?
- How do we encourage -- including funding -- neighborhood government in our cities so that the people most affected by the American urban disaster can try their own hand at rebuilding their communities?

The principle that all government should be devolved to the lowest practical level should be raised to its proper primacy in the progressive agenda. We cannot overstate the peril involved in continuing to concentrate governmental power in the federal executive. The past two decades, with Watergate and Iran-Contra, have brought us twice within a breath of total breakdown of democratic government. Our best defense against such authoritarian breaches is a healthy, democratic, decentralized American system of government.

The resolution proved too much for the traditional liberals of ADA and the resolution was roundly defeated in committee. Move further to the left, however, and you find the notion of devolution implicitly or explicitly near the heart of the agenda. In fact, much of the change in the left since the sixties has involved taking the idea of devolution out of the commune and into the community and the nation. The statist marxists are fading; the new progressives want the utility controlled by their city and not by a national administration.

But despite the productive work of the Greens and the Libertarians (whose very emphasis on decentralization removes them from normal left-right characterization), and the practical ideas of community land trusters, co-housing groups, cooperatives, and devolutionary thinkers, mainstream American politics has remained surprisingly indifferent to the decentralist currents sweeping around it. The media doesn't see it as an issue. And within the progressive movement, devolution of power too often seems an afterthought.

This is ironic, for progressives are in fact riding one of history's waves, a pleasure that doesn't happen often. Part of the problem, I suspect, is that progressives are so used to being pushed to the margins of politics that it is hard to believe that much of America could agree with us about anything.

Many voters, in fact, have divined the problem of excessive scale while remaining, unsurprisingly, confused as to what to do about it. False prophets on the right tout a phony "empowerment," Ross Perot says he can handle it all by himself, Clinton vaguely promises to "put people first." The media muddles the matter with its usually in-depth cliches.

What is lacking is not devolutionary theory, nor grand schemes, nor useful experiments, but rather a practical progressive politics of devolution. We need to apply our theories and our experience to the every day politics of ordinary citizens. If we do, I think we will surprise ourselves and others in a discovery of where the American mainstream really flows.

Here, for starters, are a few suggestions of devolutionary issues progressives could press:

- **Public schools:** In the sixties there was a strong movement for community control of the schools. Because it came largely from minority communities and because the majority was not adequately distressed about public education it faltered. The issue has recently revived and it shows strength and should be pushed.

Here's one reason why:

Under a headline, PARENTS TELL DC SUPERINTENDENT: CUT BUREAUCRACY, NOT 430 TEACHERS, the *Washington Post* reported that a parents' group had calculated that in 1979 the DC school system had 114,000 students and just over 500 administrative employees. By 1991, the student population was down to 83,000 but central staff was up to over 1000. Today there are 1425 central office employees.

Such absurdities can not be dealt with effectively by playing endless budgetary cat and mouse games with administrators whose primary function in life is to keep their own jobs. The problem needs to be addressed directly through community control and the dismantling of school bureaucracies.

- **Neighborhood government:** Real neighborhood government would not be merely advisory as is the case with Washington DC's neighborhood commissions. It would include the power to sue the city government, to incorporate, to run its own programs, to contract to provide those of city hall, and to have some measure of budgetary authority over city expenditures within its boundaries. Not the least among its powers should be a role in the justice system, since it is impossible to recreate order in our communities while denying communities any place in maintaining order. We should create the "small republics," that Jefferson dreamed of, autonomous communities where every citizen became "an acting member of the common government, transacting in person a great portion of its rights and duties, subordinate indeed, yet important, and entirely within his own competence."

States' rights: While maintaining federal preeminence in fields such as civil rights, progressives should be strong advocates of states' rights on issues not properly the federal government's business such as raising the drinking age or the 55 mph speed limit. Such advocacy would help to form new coalitions and stir up the ideological pot. In particular, progressives should oppose the use of federal green-mail -- forcing states and localities to take measures at the risk of losing federal funding -- as a clear end run around the 10th amendment of the Bill of Rights. As the Supreme Court noted in *Kansas v. Colorado*, this amendment "discloses the widespread fear that the national government might, under the pressure of supposed general welfare, attempt to exercise powers which had not been granted."

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Federal spending: In an important and necessary break with liberal thinking, progressives should become advocates of a much smaller federal government by pressing for the direct distribution of funds to the state and local level. Whatever problems of malfeasance or nonfeasance may result, they are almost guaranteed to be less than the misuse of these funds at the federal level. As Congress's own auditor, Comptroller General Charles Bowsher, recently told a hearing that "there are hardly any [federal] agencies that are well managed."

The flaw in liberal thinking is that federal housing funds are used for housing, agriculture funds for farmers and so forth. In fact, an extraordinary percentage of these moneys are used to maintain a superstructure to carry out poor housing policy or bad farm policy. The basic principle should be to get the money to the streets or the farms as quickly -- and with as few intermediaries -- as possible.

Further, progressives should challenge the presumption that the feds know best.[1] At the present time, much of the best government is at the state and local level. It could do even better without the paperwork and the restrictions dreamed up in Washington to fill the working day. And even when that doesn't prove true, you don't have to drive as far to make your political anger known.

Small business: Many progressives act as though an economy isn't necessary. It would pay great dividends if the progressive agenda included support for small businesses. Small businesses generate an extraordinary number of new jobs. In the decade of the 1980s, for example, American small businesses made some 14 million new jobs, more than twice as many as were created in either Western Europe or Japan. Meanwhile, Fortune 500 companies were cutting back employment at a rate of about 400,000 jobs a year.

Further, small business is where many of the values of the progressive movement can be best expressed in an economic context. While ideally many of these businesses should be cooperatives, even within the strictures of conventional capitalism they offer significant advantages over the mega-corporation.

Writing in the *New York Times*, brokerage firm president Muriel Siebert said recently:

> Unlike monolithic Fortune 500 companies, small businesses behave like families. [A study] indicated that one reason for the durability of businesses owned by women is the value they place on their workers. It showed that small businesses hold on to workers through periods when revenues decline. Rather than eliminate workers, they tend to cut other expenses, including their own salaries... Nearly half of the workers laid off by large companies have to swallow pay reductions when they find new full-time work; two out of three work for at least 20 percent less money than before.

As Jon Rowe says of Korean family-run groceries, "a family operates on loyalty and trust, the market operates on contract and law."

How does support for small business convert into policy? As one example, Siebert has proposed a job creation credit instead of the investment tax credit favored by Washington pols and heavily favoring big corporations. She suggested a credit equal to 25% of wages for every new worker hired by a company over a two-year period after the credit went into effect. Only increased payrolls would qualify. The cost of this would be offset by the taxes paid by the new employees, reduced unemployment benefits and public assistance costs. Because of the higher job generation of small business, this tax credit would clearly do small business more good than the Fortune 500.

Decentralizing the federal government: There a number of federal agencies that are already quite decentralized. Interestingly, these agencies are among those most often praised. The National Park Service, the Peace Corps, the Coast Guard, and US Attorneys all have dispersed units with a relatively high degree of autonomy and a strong sense of turf responsibility by their employees. A further example can be found within the postal service. While many complain about mail service, you rarely hear them gripe about their own mail carrier, who is given a finite task in a finite geographical area.

I stumbled across this phenomenon while serving in the Coast Guard. At the time, the Guard had about 1800 units worldwide but only 3000 officers, with many of the officers concentrated on larger ships and in headquarters units. Thus there were scores of units run by enlisted personnel who rarely saw an officer. The system worked extremely well.

It worked because, once training and adequate equipment had been provided, there was relatively little a bureaucratic superstructure could do to improve the operations of a lifeboat or loran station. As with education, a bureaucracy in such circumstances can do itself far more good than it can do anyone in the field. Similarly, a former Peace Corps regional director told me that in his agency's far-flung and decentralized system, there was no way he could control activities in the two dozen countries under his purview, yet the Peace Corps became one of the most popular federal programs in recent times.

Can the success of these decentralized agencies be replicated, say, in housing or urban development? Why not give it a try? If federal housing moneys were distributed by 50 state directors who were given considerable leeway in the mix of policies they could fund and approve, we would, for starters, begin to have a better idea of which programs work and which don't.

At least one major corporation has found that autonomy works. Johnson & Johnson, the *Wall Street Journal* reports, has averaged a 13% annual growth in its earnings per share over the past decade. It operates with 166 units around the world, each largely autonomous, "its

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[1] One small example: back in the seventies when I was on a neighborhood commission we sought Bureau of Outdoor Recreation funds to blacktop a basketball court next to a school. The federal agency told us we couldn't get the money unless the school system agreed not to use the court for building expansion for the next twenty years.

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contact with headquarters largely limited to reporting results. This places authority in the hands of managers nearest the marketplace, and frees top management to focus on broad trends."

Raising the issue: Every policy and piece of legislation should be subjected to evaluation not only according to the old rules of right and left but according to the ideology of scale. We must constantly be asking not only whether what is proposed is right, but whether it is being done at the right level of society's organization.

These are just a few examples of how a politics of devolution might begin to develop. It is needed if for no other reason than it is our best defense against the increasing authoritarianism of the federal government and the monopolization of economic activity. It is also needed because, without it, democracy becomes little more than a choice between alternative propaganda machines.

In the 1960s, Robert McNamara declared, "Running any large organization is the same, whether it's the Ford Motor Company, the Catholic Church or the Department of Defense. Once you get the certain scale, they're all the same."

And so, increasingly to our detriment, they are. We have recently "changed" administrations, but, unless challenged by a politics of devolution, this will largely leave untouched that which is administered. We must learn and teach, and make a central part of our politics, that while small is not always beautiful, it has -- for our ecology, our liberties, and our souls -- become absolutely essential. -- *Sam Smith*

WEATHER REPORT

Good news

Less than three years after Italy's parliament made it illegal to use drugs, the government has decriminalize drug use. Penalties remain for selling drugs or possession of more than three days' average dose. Drug users are still subject to civil penalties such as loss of drivers' and gun permits, and confiscation of passports.

Land of the free

Those who think our Owellian fears about the future of this country are a bit paranoic might wish to refer to a more establishment journal, *Parameters,* which is published by the US Army War College. The winter issue contains an article that posits an American coup in the year 2012. Air Force Lt. Col. Charles J. Dunlap, Jr., the author of the article ascribes this future assumption of power by the military to the steadily mounting roster of missions -- narcotics interdiction and international humanitarian relief among them -- that the services are saddled with today. "By the year 2000," in his scenario, "the armed forces had penetrated many vital aspects of American society. With so much responsibility for virtually everything government was expected to do, the military increasingly demanded a larger role in policy making."

Just politics

The bipartisan cover-ups of the S&L crisis and BCCI scandal has now been followed by the Beltway brothers all agreeing that Bush's reprehensible pardon of Weinberger et al was just fine. Foley, Aspin and Clinton all took a fall on this one. The Clintonistas were also curiously silent as the Department of Justice busily shredded documents in the months before the Inauguration.

Politicians love to talk about productivity and rejuvenating America's manufacturing base. But, as the *New York Times* reported recently, it won't be easy. Factory productivity has outstripped services virtually every year since World War II. American factories produce five times as much today as they did in 1946 -- but employ the same number of workers, about 12 million.

The mediacracy

Project Censored is out with its list of the top under-covered stories of the year. Number one was the creation of huge media monopolies under the favoring gaze of the Reagan/Bush administration. Unlike the media monopolies themselves, Ben Bagdikian hit this hard in a story in *Mother Jones.* Other selections:

- Corporate crime
- Various censored election year issues
- The international trade in arms
- Iraqgate
- The failure of the war on drugs
- Trashing federal regulations for corporate profit
- Government secrecy
- Advertising pressure on publishers
- The post cold-war black budget

The *Washington Post* has finally come out for DC statehood. It only took 22 and a half years. Even the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe* beat the *Post* to the punch. In a long editorial, the *Post* showed, however, that

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it still doesn't understand the concept, suggesting that several restrictions be put on statehood, something that it should know is unconstitutional. The Supreme Court long ago determined that conditions cannot be placed on statehood.

Eco-notes

- Paper from banana stems is being developed in Costa Rica.
- Proctor & Gamble is planing to produce a synthetic diesel oil derived from animal fats and soybean oil. Some 160 vehicles in Missouri already run on this fuel.
- The Council on Economic Priorities has named Cargill, DuPont, General Electric, General Motors, Georgia-Pacific, Maxxam, Rockwell and USX as having the worst environmental records in their industries.

Drug busts

Christine Peralta, PTA president at an elementary school in San Luis Obispo CA, lost her position after she publicly said she supported marijuana legalization.

The *Dallas Morning News* reports that three years after the invasion of Panama, drug smuggling and money laundering in that country appears to be setting new records. Part of the problem is that drug-running is now a free market, rather than being controlled by Noriega. A former ambassador says what has happened in similar to the privatization of a monolithic industry once hampered by government regulation.

A Florida judge, frustrated at an overload of drug cases at the cost of handling serious crime, urged one drug defendant to pay his bond and then skip town.

Here's part of the exchange between Judge Robert Fogan and prosecutor James DeHart about the charge, which carried a three year mandatory minimum upon conviction:

FOGAN: Oh, Lord. This is the dumbest statute on the books. We are letting violent sexual offenders out on the street because of this case here keeping people in prison.

DEHART: Judge, you are bound by the law. We have to follow the law.

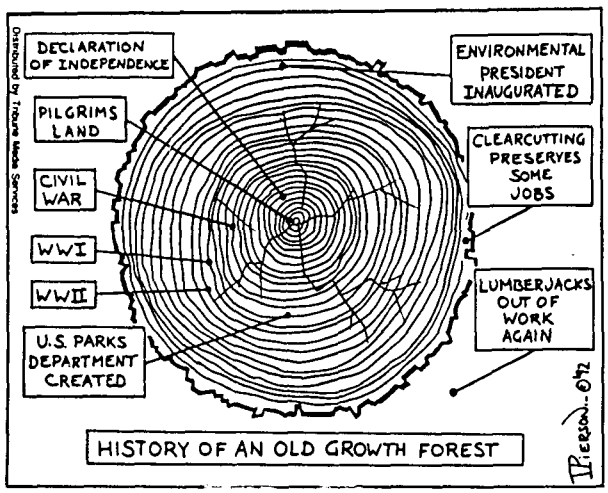
FOGAN: I am bound by the law, but the law says I can let him go on a bond, and I'll let him go on a bond in a minute if he can make a bond.

DEHART: Yeah, but let him go and say leave town, judge...

FOGAN: 'I hope he leaves town. I swear to God I hope he leaves town.

Here are some other examples of judges criticizing the war on drugs compiled by Lynn Washington for PNS:

∝ The Florida State Supreme Court compared police searches of interstate buses to "police state practices of Hitler's Berlin or Stalin's Moscow."



∝ A Chicago judge described the practice of evicting public housing tenants for minor drug infractions as a cosmetic, headline-grabbing policy that masks the drug war's failure.

∝ The Massachusetts Supreme Court rejected random drug testing of Boston police officers -- even though approved by federal courts -- saying that the state's constitution "should not become a casualty in the war on drugs."

∝ The Minnesota Supreme Court threw out parts of a drug sentencing law on the grounds it was racially discriminatory.

Notes from the real world

We argued back in October 1991 that those in charge of the former Soviet Union might want to take it easy on their way to conversion to capitalism of the late 20th century American variety: "If you look for salvation in our way of doing business you may only be buying yourself a few years grace."

We were too optimistic. Rampant privatization and Harvard Business School economics have proved too much for the poor Russian economy to handle. It's not really surprising since it hasn't worked so well in the robust American economy either, not to mention the disastrous results of the Thatcherite variety.

You might think that after three such notable failures, the media would give some credence to alternative economic approaches. If the *New York Times* is any guide, however, don't hold your breath.

The *NYT* has recently taken to running bizarre front-page headlines over economic stories, the first being one that credited improved economic indicators to a Clinton recovery, which, if true, would have made Willie the most effective president-elect in our history.

Then on December 17, the *NYT* announced that 21 MONTHS OF 'SHOCK THERAPY' RESUSCITATES POLISH ECONOMY.

The evidence for this is that industrial production, which declined 39 percent in 1990 and 1991 is now on the

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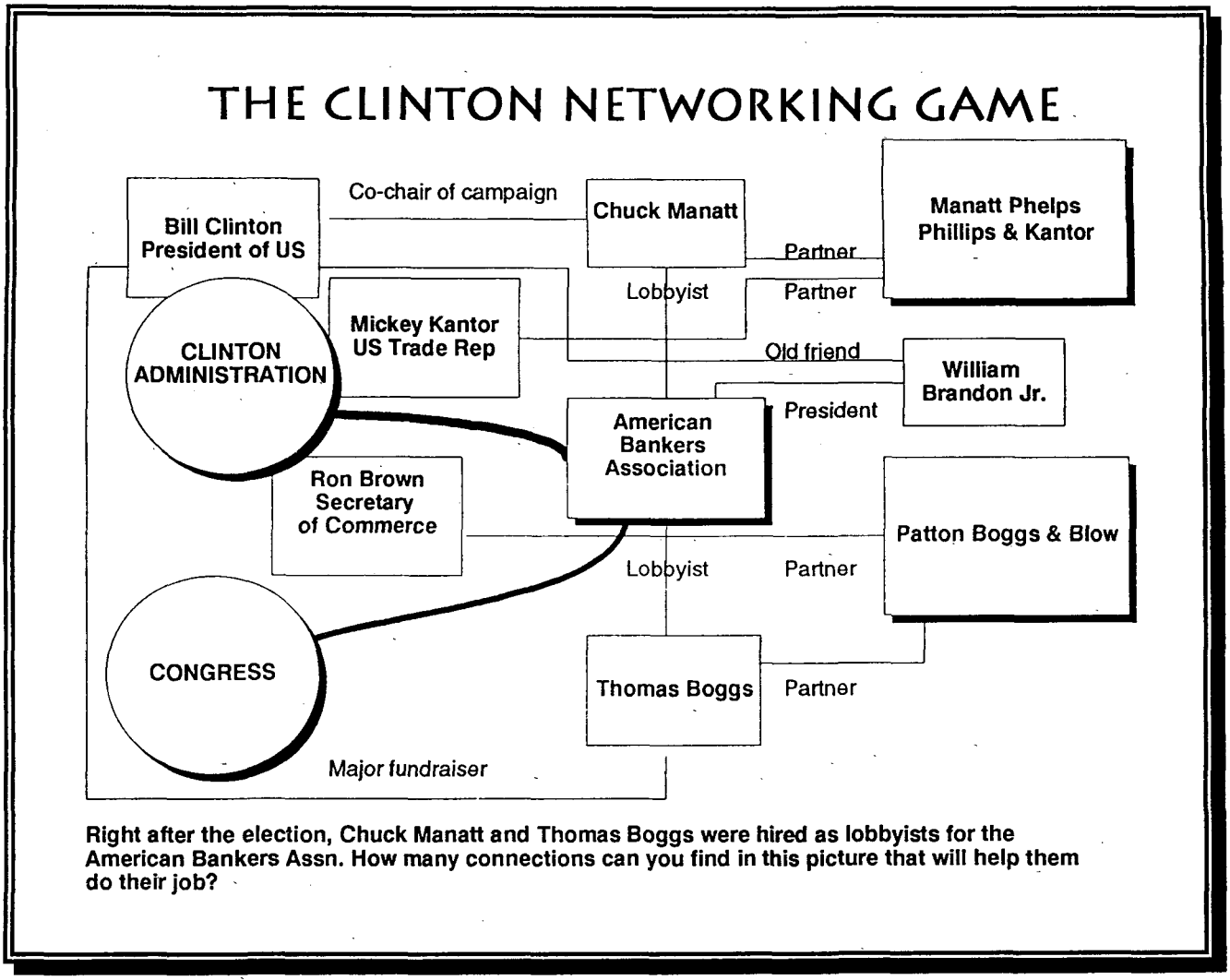

Right after the election, Chuck Manatt and Thomas Boggs were hired as lobbyists for the American Bankers Assn. How many connections can you find in this picture that will help them do their job?

rise and that Poland is on its way to be the first formerly Communist nation to record any annual economic growth at all.

The *NYT* did not note when production declines 39% it has to rebound 64% just to get back to where it was. The paper did, however, admit (well down the page) that inflation is still 40% and unemployment is 13.5%.

The reporter obviously hadn't read the Dec 14 op-ed piece by Amherst economics professor David M. Kotz, which noted that "Far from creating the basis for a revival, the free-market plunge [in Russia] mainly worsened an already serious crisis. Private initiative has indeed fostered new economic activity but largely in small-scale commerce, services and a free-wheeling financial sector. Meanwhile, production has fallen about three times as fast in 1992 as in 1991, and prices are spiralling upwards. Most Russians have been pushed below the poverty line, including much of the middle class."

Old news

We read in *What's New with the BTUs* that India and Japan are both moving ahead with cold fusion experiments *[ProRev June 92]*. Nippon Tel & Tel claims that one of its scientists found "direct evidence" of a nuclear reaction in a cold fusion experiment. A Toyota subsidiary is also doing experiments. The US Dept. of Energy, on the other hand, has ended its cold fusion research, as has General Electric.

Clintoniana

Bill Clinton is on the verge of giving diversity a bad name. His cabinet, while symbolically variegated has about as much substantive diversity as the dinner committee of the American Bar Association national convention. Two-thirds of his top picks are lawyers, many of them lobbyists, until now not considered a protected class under the civil rights laws. Clinton reached deep into the board of the New York Stock Exchange to find a black UN ambassador, to a nuclear power company for a woman secretary of energy, and to a leading corporate opponent of national health insurance for a female attorney general. His black secretary of commerce has made more deals than a Trump casino croupier and his two latino urbanists are best noted for their mayoral encouragement of airports, sports arenas, convention centers and similar deficit-spawning extravaganzas of the sort that have helped to make urban America the grim place it is today.

Clinton's best choices do include two women -- Browner and Shalala (although Ma Donna participated in

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the anti-free speech hysteria that has swept American campuses of late) -- but on the whole the only thing that can be said of Clinton's ostentatious ethnic and sexual efforts is that he may help to convince people that such distinctions really don't matter.

It has long been our view that one should be particularly wary of any business that claims to have a code of ethics. The Clinton administration has now joined the aluminum siding industry in an elaborate profession of moral standards, a claim somewhat muddied by both the number of appointees recusing themselves from major matters that fall under their jurisdiction and the variety of their recusal plans. While one cabinet appointee said he would build a "Chinese wall" between himself and his formerly highly remunerative interests, the erstwhile nominee for Justice limited her recusal to matters having a "direct and predictable effect" on her prior employers. Ron Brown, undoubtedly toughened by his representation of Baby Doc, said he would only recuse himself for twelve months on issues affecting former clients and not at all in matters affecting his law firm.

The impression has been given that the new commerce secretary's Haitian fling was but a transitory business matter. It was transitory, but only because Brown lost his gig when Baby Doc flew into exile. He approached the new government, suggesting that it continue his services -- he had after all helped to boost US aid to Haiti more than 40%. His offer was declined.

When Brown found himself criticized for staging a thank-Ron-Brown-gala for major Democratic contributors at $10,000 a shot, an aide said, "There is no way you can buy Ron Brown by sponsoring a little event for him." Which brought to mind a tale that political analyst Mark Plotkin claims is true. A New York fundraiser took a major mark out to lunch, at the end of which the donor wrote out a check for $10,000. The fundraiser tore up the check, explaining that "the lunch is already paid for."

Even better than a campaign contribution or a Ron Brown gala ticket was a tax-deductible gift to the Clinton Inauguration. Major corporations coughed up $2.5 million of these. Another $17 million came in interest-free loans. Coca Cola lent $100,000. Chrysler, Ford and GM all lent cars and trucks. Anheuser-Bush gave $100,000 and lent another $100,000, not to mention the Clydesdales for the parade. Hillary's brothers even tried, unsuccessfully, to put the squeeze on Ford, Mobil and Chevron to give them $10,000 each to cover their inaugural expenses. Said Hugh Rodman: "We obviously need to pay for it somehow. We're just small fries, that's all we are. " And the inaugural committee hoped to gross $8 million from the sale of TV air time, including the selling of the heretofore public Lincoln Memorial site for HBO's coverage of a Clinton musical extravaganza.

University of Pennsylvania communications professor George Gerbner told the *Washington Post*, "This sort of thing sends a message that everything is for sale in our country, even the presidency."

On the other hand, a representative of General Motors said it was "a real marketing opportunity."

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that at least four of Clinton's cabinet choices -- Browner, Brown, Kantor and Babbitt -- received help from lobbyists in preparing for confirmation hearings.

Furthermore. . .

While the ACLU was right in fighting Mayor Dinkins' attempt to oust the Ancient Order of Hibernians from control of the St. Patricks Day because of their anti-gay rules, the issue was only the First Amendment, and not freedom of religion as Cardinal O'Connor suggested. In fact, St. Patrick's Day was secularized and turned into its familiar rowdy form by American Irish *protestants* back in the early 19th century. If matters had been left to the Pope, the holiday in NYC would be celebrated as in Ireland -- a holy day of obligation with the pubs closed.

One of the more tedious media practices is the year-in-review. The only 1992 example of the genre that we truly enjoyed was the list of the best of the police blotter from the *Forecaster* of Falmouth ME. A few selections:

Jan 28: Assistance was requested on Mountain Road for a child with a button up his nose.

Apr 22: Report received from a clerk at the 7-eleven store that four juveniles had just purchased two dozen eggs.

May 16: Suzanne Lavoie called to report that her children bought some handcuffs at a yard sale, tried them out and couldn't get them off. Sergeant Kloth removed them with a screwdriver and hammer.

Aug 3: An ambulance was requested for Rick and Wendy Wieber of 7 Medinah Circle. The Wiebers were attending a real estate open house at 173 Foreside Road when the enclosed deck they were inspecting broke free of the house and fell about ten feet.

Sep 17: Alexena Campbell of Cumberland came to the Police Department to complain of paint that had just been sprayed upon her car while it was parked on Main St. Officer David Shaw upon inspecting her vehicle concluded that the offending material had come from a bird passing overhead.

Dec 23: Mrs. Ella Kent of Wiscasset, just arrived in Yarmouth, called local police to ask them to get in touch with Wiscasset Police in order that they might go to her home and turn off the stove on which she inadvertently left potatoes boiling.

Here is a list of a few nations that have survived despite having homosexuals in their military:
Australia, Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden & Switzerland

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THE IDEA MILL

Ecology

• Patrick Hare proposes that there are legal grounds for challenging the car-oriented zoning practices of American cities that date back to a Supreme Court decision in 1926. Hare notes that this decision was based on then prevailing concepts of health, safety and the environment. The court ruled, for example, that zoning provided "promotion of the health and security of children and others by separating dwelling houses from territory devoted to trade and industry; suppression and prevention of disorder; aiding the health and safety of the community by excluding from residential areas the confusion and danger of fire, contagion and disorder which in greater or lesser degree attach to the location of stores, shops and factories." The court also said that "the segregation of residential, business and industrial building will... greatly tend to prevent street accidents, especially to children by reducing the traffic and confusion in residential sections." Hare argues that the decision should be challenged not on its legal logic but on the expert testimony that supported it. Urban ecologists now question many of the assumptions the court made. *Hare is interested in comments and information on other key early lawsuits. Patrick Hare, 1246 Monroe St. NE, DC 20017*

Minneapolis officials have proposed building light rail along a major interstate rather than adding new lanes as the state wants to do. Light rail would cost $400 million; the new lanes $1 billion.

ROADSIGNS

Civil liberties

Percent of college freshmen who believe that employers can require drug tests: 83%

Percent who believe that racist or sexist speech should be prohibited: 61%

Number of seizures under the civil forfeiture laws passed in the 1980s: 146, 485

Clinton administration

Number of 18 cabinet level officials who are lawyers: 13

Number of four top economic officials who are lawyers: 4

Percent of all eligible voters who cast ballots for Bill Clinton: 23.3%, the smallest percentage since John Quincy Adams in 1824.

Democracy

Percent of Americans who can name a Clinton appointee: 21%

Percent who are aware of Bush's Iran-Contra pardons: 23%

Percent who watched one of the TV movies about Amy Fisher: 40%

Drugs

Number of Georgia sheriffs indicted on drug charges since 1981: 13

Ecology

Number of times the auto mileage of the average American has increased since 1950: 3

Percent of all trips in US taken by auto: 82%

Percent of all trips in Europe taken by auto: 40%

Economics

Number of cooperatives in America: 30,000

Number of jobs that would have to be created in order to provide work for welfare recipients if Clinton's plan for removing them from the rolls after two years is approved: 1.5 million -- half the size of the federal government.

Food

Number of miles the average supermarket carrot travels from farm to table: 2000

Number of miles the average food item travels: 1300

Foreign

Average life expectancy Latin America and Caribbean: 67.4 years

Average life expectancy Cuba: 75.4 years

Average mortality of children under five, Latin America and Caribbean: 70 per thousand births

Average mortality of children under five, Cuba, per thousand births: 14 per thousand births.

Transportation

Number of rural Americans who have no vehicles or cannot drive: 25-30 million.

Federal funds for rural transportation as a proportion of federal subsidy of Washington's subway system: less than half.

Welfare

Number of Virginia welfare recipients who have been trained under workfare since 1990 and have found work: 6000

Number of Virginia welfare recipients who have been trained under workfare since 1990 but can't find work: 20,000

Number of Virginia welfare recipients on the waiting list for job training: 20,000

SOURCES

CIVIL LIBERTIES: American Council on Education, *USA Today* CLINTON ADMINISTRATION: *New Republic*, Curtis Gans in *Newsday* DEMOCRACY: Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press DRUGS: *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* ECOLOGY: World Resources Institute, Urban Ecology ECONOMICS: Gar Alpervitz in *Washington Post*, Senator Pat Moynihan FOOD: *Oakland Tribune* FOREIGN: *New York Times* TRANSPORTATION: *Washington Post* WELFARE: *Washington Post*

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SOME MAJOR DEMOCRATIC CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTORS

	Group amount	Individual Amount
AGRIBUSINESS	**$171,000**	
Archer Daniels Midland		$138,000
Tysons Food		$33,000
BANKING & FINANCIAL	**$645,000**	
AG Edwards		$16,000
American Express		$19,000
Chicago Mercantile Exchange		$30,000
Equitable Life		$61,000
First Boston		$49,000
Goldman Sachs		$152,000
Stephens Inc		$36,000
Lazard Freres		$129,000
Merrill Lynch		$111,000
Prudential Insurance Company		$42,000
Worthen Bank		*$2 million line of credit*
COMMUNICATIONS	**$54,000**	
ATT		$33,000
Little Bells		$21,000
ENTERTAINMENT	**$867,000**	
Black Entertainment Network		$32,000
Record producer David Geffen		$120,000
MCA		$238,000
Sony of America		$158,000
Time Warner		$128,000
Walt Disney		$191,000
HEALTH INDUSTRY	**2000000***	
Thomas L. Blair		$100,000
INDIVIDUALS	**$301,000**	
Alide Rockefeller Mersinger		$301,000
INSURANCE	**$231,000**	
Peter Lewis		$231,000
LIQUOR INDUSTRY		
Anheuser-Busch		$171,000
Gallo Wineries		$100,000

**Estimated amount*

OIL	**$391,000**	
Atlantic Richfield		$257,000
Chevron		$94,000
Exxon		$40,000
NATURAL GAS	**$22,000**	
Thomas 'Mack' McLarty		$22,000
TOBACCO	**$631,000**	
RJR Nabisco		$301,000
Philip Morris		$202,000
Tobacco Institute		$128,000
TRIAL LAWYERS	**$550,000**	
American Trial Lawyers Assn		$550,000
UNIONS	**$2,096,500**	
AFL-CIO		$7,500
AFSCME		$256,000
American Federation of Teachers		$189,000
Building & Construction Trades		$39,000
National Assn of Letter Carriers		$107,000
National Education Assn		$415,000
Service Employees Intnl		$144,000
Sheet Metal Workers		$219,000
United Auto Workers		$226,000
United Brotherhood of Carpenters		$50,000
United Mine Workers		$46,000
United Steelworkers		$398,000
OTHERS		
Coca Cola		$62,000
Connel Co., Westfield NJ		$100,000
Glaxo		$80,000
Mashantucket Pequot Tribe		$100,000
John Moores		$200,000
Margaret Schink		$100,000
CJ Wang, CEO International Corp		$100,000

Corporate listings include officers and affiliates
Industry totals only for those firms listed
Sources: National Library on Money & Politics & news articles

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FIELD NOTES

GROUPS

Student press censorship: A Florida college paper's staff is fired for writing about homosexuality, drug abuse and abortion. An Illinois student editor is fired for running articles deemed "not good for the image of the college" A community college president in Kansas shuts down a multi-award winning student newspaper for running an editorial criticizing how he handled the resignation of a basketball coach. These stories are just a few examples of widespread student press censorship. The only national organization dedicated exclusively to this problem is the Student Press Law Center, which offers legal advice and mediation and serves as an advocate for the First Amendment in the courts. [*SPLC, 1735 Eye St. NW #504, DC 20006. 202-466-5242]*

League of Indigenous Sovereign Nations of the Western Hemisphere: Organization of Indian people from throughout the hemisphere that is working for sovereignty and a seat in the United Nations. [LISN c/o Piscataway Indian Nation, PO Box 312, Port Tobacco MD 20677 301-735-5555]

New Party: Described by *Utne Reader* as a party that "aims to forge a unified force of environmentalists, feminists, labor, minorities, and average citizens sick of the status quo." [NP, 720 Monroe Street, Hoboken NJ 07030. 201-795-2013

READING

Northern Ireland: *Northern Ireland Human Rights Review* tells you things about the situation there you won't read in other American media or from the heavily censored British press and broadcasting. Published by American Protestants for Truth About Ireland. Subscriptions are $20. [NIHRR, 104 E. Main Street, Lansdale PA 19446]

Political Woman: a new newsletter, which in its first issue has profiles of Clinton's female appointees, an article on Senator Packwood and news briefs. $35 a year. [PW, 276 Chatterton Parkway, White Plains NY 10606]

Torturers' Lobby: a report from the Center for Public Integrity on how countries that use torture are represented in Washington. Both Democrats and Republicans are involved. $10. [CPI, 1910 K Street NW #802 DC 20006. 202-223-0299]

GUIDES

The National Boycott News: The place to find out who's boycotting whom and why. The winter issue is just out and available from NBN, 6506 28th Ave NE, Seattle WA 98115

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